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Burnshirt River Reserve
Ware River Watershed

Draft Proposal

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Please send comments on this proposal by November 1, 2005 to:

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Overview of Natural Resources within the proposed Burnshirt River Forest Reserve in the Ware River watershed:

The proposed reserve is located in the towns of Hubbardston and Barre in the central part of the state. The reserve area includes approximately 3,650 acres of DCR Division of Water Supply Protection's (DWSP) Ware River watershed ownership and is bounded on the south by Rte 62, on the east by Barre Road, and on the north by Williamsville Road. Gilbert Road runs through the reserve area to the west. An interior roadless block of approximately 1,000 acres exists in the middle of the larger reserve area. Three tributaries, the Burnshirt River, the Canesto River, and Natty Pond brook, pass through the reserve area.

DWSP's management is currently guided by the Ware River Watershed Land Management Plan 2003-2012. In this plan, the watershed is divided into three zones or management strategies. This proposed reserve was originally divided for active management as follows: 800 acres in strategy 1 (no cutting zone); 400 acres in strategy 2 (partial cutting); and 2,450 acres in strategy 3 (all types of silviculture allowed). The predominant vegetative cover in this area is mature stands of mixed white pine and oak. There are about 25 acres of fields in this area including one at the old Hubbardston landfill.

The proposed forest reserve in the Ware River watershed ranked fifteenth in the state among the 22 potential forest reserves using the biodiversity rating system. The strength of this potential reserve in protecting landscape level biological diversity is the fact that it abuts almost 15,000 acres of other DWSP protected holdings.

DWSP has been involved in designating reserve areas in all of its watersheds throughout the course of its management planning activities. Currently designated reserves on DWSP lands range in size from the local habitat of an endangered plant species to large islands in Quabbin Reservoir and the 1,200 acre Pottapaug Natural Area in Hardwick. The Division has participated with EOEA and the other state agencies in this large reserve identification process largely based on an interest in comparing biological diversity and habitat functions on managed areas versus large reserves. To promote this aspect of the reserve designation process, DWSP has assisted EOEA in setting up a long term ecological monitoring (LTEM) program based at the University of Massachusetts in the Department of Natural Resource Conservation. The objective of this effort is to measure and analyze critical environmental indicators of biological diversity on state lands, contrasting areas managed for water supply protection or habitat development to areas restricted from timber harvesting. The designation of the 3,650 acre Burnshirt River Forest Reserve in the Ware River watershed would provide a long-term opportunity to document differences and similarities between lands under active forest management versus those reserved from commercial timber harvesting.

DCR and DWSP have also considered another area in Hubbardston as a possible substitute for the area identified above. This alternative proposed reserve is also located on the Ware River watershed along Joslin Brook and a few other headwater streams. DWSP manages approximately 3,050 acres in this area, which is also guided by the Ware River Watershed Land Management Plan 2003-2012. Of the 3,050 acres in this possible reserve area, 700 acres are in strategy 1; 350 acres are in strategy 2; and 2,000 acres are in strategy 3. The predominant vegetative cover in this area is mature white pine and oak .There are about 35 acres of fields in this area. At this time this possible reserve has not yet been scored using the biodiversity rating system.